

Social Worker		New South Wales (NSW)
ASCO Code: 2511-11	June 2008	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment: <i>Shortages are particularly evident for those requiring three years or more experience in specialised areas such as child abuse, drug and alcohol, mental health and HIV/AIDS.</i>		

Occupational demand

Census data show that employment of social workers grew by a solid five per cent per annum between 2001 and 2006. Since then demand for the occupation has grown further with increased government spending on a number of programs. The NSW Department of Community Services (DOCS) increased the number of its caseworkers by 841 from June 2004 to March 2008. The NSW Government also allocated an additional \$939 million to mental health, including more mental health professionals, over the five years from 2006-07.

Occupational supply

DEEWR estimates that additions to supply from university completions averaged about 280 persons a year in the three years to 2007, which was close to the figure for the previous three years. The training rate (annual university completions as a percentage of employed social workers) is 7.8 per cent based on an estimated workforce of 3,300. Based on Census data, the apparent wastage rate from the occupation is 6.8 per cent a year. The above-average training rate and wastage rate for the occupation reflects the fact that many social work graduates enter related occupations in the welfare, community and health sectors. Census data indicate that effective supply to the occupation from overseas immigration averaged about 30 persons a year from 2001 to 2006. There was a small net loss of social workers from NSW interstate over the same period.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for social workers found that 56 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. Unfilled and hard-to-fill vacancies were distributed across a number of industry sectors, including public sector welfare services, hospitals, community health and the not-for-profit sector. The most difficult to fill vacancies were those requiring three years or more experience in specialised areas such as child abuse, drug and alcohol, mental health and HIV/AIDS. Employers reported that most applicants did not have a recognised degree in social work or did not have sufficient experience in the relevant specialisation for the level of responsibility required. Even when suitable applicants did respond there was often a mismatch between the hours of work sought by the applicant and those required for the position. In other cases, suitable applicants had found another position before the recruitment process had been finalised. Employers in the not-for-profit sector experienced particular problems in matching the remuneration and working conditions on offer in the public sector, with some positions in the former sector remaining unfilled after several months of intermittent advertising. Positions based in inland towns were also among the most difficult to fill, several failing to attract a single applicant after extensive advertising. Junior positions in Sydney and regional NSW were filled more readily and employers noted that vacancies for senior and mid-level positions usually attracted a number of applications from recent graduates.

Labour market outlook

Demand for the occupation is likely to increase further over the short term. DOCS is expected to complete recruitment for an additional 84 caseworker positions over 2008-09, while a further \$29 million has been allocated under the government's five-year mental health plan. Supply to the occupation from university completions is projected to increase in 2008-09 but this is unlikely to be sufficient to meet additional demand for experienced social workers. Shortages therefore are expected to continue over the next 12 months.